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POP MUSIC

Long road down

Elliott Smith's death is unsolved. The musician's life and lyrics are just as mysterious.

By SCOTT TIMBERG
Times Staff Writer

IN a bohemian stretch of Sunset Boulevard that winds through Silver Lake, there's a stereo repair shop with an exterior that seems, for some, oddly familiar: The coiling red and blue lines on its external wall served as the cover for an album by a battered troubadour named Elliott Smith, a Los Angeles musician who at the time of the record's release, in 2000, was one of pop's bright lights — someone who combined dark, sometimes self-lacerating lyrics with melody inspired by the British Invasion.

Signed to the DreamWorks label, with a rabid following among critics and musicians, Smith seemed poised to become a melancholic, low-key version of Beck. Fans — for whom an underground musician is often a secret passed from one to another — responded passionately to the delicacy and bedroom-scale quality of his music. It made them feel like he was singing about their lives too.

Since Oct. 22, the day after Smith's sudden death by knife wound to the chest in [See Smith, Page E46]

"When they come to the wall, they're not happy coming," says Solutions' Lew, who watches fans come and go. "They're not happy leaving. You're left with these mixed feelings."